

## **Communications Plan**

### **Introduction**

The following is a proposed Draft Communications Plan for the Washington Stormwater Management Study. This proposed Plan contains activities that, when enacted together as part of an integrated communications strategy, will be effective at helping the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) communicate with the many “publics” involved in stormwater management.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this Communications Plan is to outline activities, materials, and strategies that could, when implemented, function as an integrated communications program and provide the needed communications support for stormwater management in Washington State. The goal of the Communications Plan is to:

- Improve understanding within the State about stormwater management issues and provide a means to share the methods wastewater utilities and municipalities use to control stormwater runoff
- Raise ratepayer’s and general citizen awareness about approaches to stormwater management
- Increase the public’s understanding that it is much more cost-efficient to prevent pollutants from entering stormwater than it is to remove the pollutants after they are in the system

### **Target Audiences**

An effective communication program for WSDOT and Ecology must be tailored for targeted audiences. One cannot develop or distribute only a single fact sheet; rather, the key to an effective outreach program is to target messages to multiple and different audiences and have them respond to specific messages.

To achieve an improvement in the public’s understanding of stormwater issues several key themes should be emphasized in the Communication Plan elements. These include:

- Step One: Define public outreach objectives
- Step Two: Identify target audiences
- Step Three: Develop materials for those audiences
- Step Four: Distribute outreach materials

Specific messages must be tailored to each of these target audiences based on the objective to be achieved. It is also important to take advantage of the vast amount of public outreach information that is already available in the state and nationally.

It is anticipated that the communication plan will help to identify the relevant target audiences to receive the outreach materials, identify the gaps in availability and provide additional materials to fill identified gaps, and perhaps identify additional distribution mechanisms for these materials.

## **Defining Public Outreach Program Objectives**

The first step in developing a stormwater public outreach program is to clearly identify the program's objectives. Are we trying to educate a property owner about stormwater challenges? Do you want to make commercial property owners aware of the potential of cost savings related to stormwater controls? Do we want to education young people to become more active participants in stormwater planning? Do we want a marketing tool for potential buyers of particular materials such a fertilizers and pesticides? Do we want to promote environmental stewardship of our resources by empowering stewardship activities and effective pollution control practices?

### **Potential Communication Plan Elements:**

#### **Newsletter**

A quarterly newsletter could be developed an published to provide specific information about stormwater issues. The primary target audience for the newsletter will be stormwater program owners and implementers, but articles will be written to appeal to a broader audience as well. The objectives of the newsletter are:

#### **Utility Bill Inserts**

Currently, many municipalities use utility bill inserts to communicate with ratepayers. However, a mechanism may need to be developed to coordinate bill insert information within the State.

#### **Broadcast Faxes**

When there is a need to communicate its position on an issue, broadcast faxing provides an efficient and cost-effective way to reach some targeted audiences.

### **Speakers Bureau**

There are numerous requests to provide speakers at civic, environmental, government and business group meetings. A speakers bureau can manage those requests and ensure that speakers are well prepared and present a consistent message.

### **Information Materials**

A series of information tools developed to educate and raise awareness about stormwater can be extremely effective when they are distributed and used liberally. Information materials can be developed and used to support presentations, mailed out to callers requesting more information, used during media briefings, offered to libraries, sent to environmental groups and circulated to others in the industry. Several information tools can be designed to work together in an information kit. The information materials can be specifically targeted to various stakeholder such as:

- Builders and Site Construction Managers
- New Property Owners
- Existing Property Owners
- Point of Purchase Pollution Prevention Materials
- Homeowner Association Meetings

### **Media Releases**

A well informed media is better able to report balanced news stories. Media releases can be prepared and distributed to the press regarding stormwater at key events such as (Clean Water or Drinking Water Week, Earth Day, etc.).

### **Public Service Announcements**

Cable and broadcast media (radio and television) resources can create timely and upbeat public service announcements with educational messages that will help bolster awareness about stormwater.

### **Collaborative Cable Channel Program Outreach**

Another opportunity depends on access to a cable channel is the development of informational or educational programs. For example, school aged children could be provided a kid's game show or nature program with different schools participating each month. This could be a valuable educational tool and an invaluable method of spreading key message to both children and adults. Other options include inviting local artists and musicians to produce works to be featured on television with stormwater themes; displaying children's environmental artwork as backdrops for printed messages; an adult talk show about stormwater hosted by a high school science class; and a science program showing kids how to measure rain fall.

## **Displays and Exhibits**

Three-dimensional or interactive displays are valuable and effective information dissemination tools, especially for reaching younger people. With information that already has been generated, temporary or permanent displays can be developed. Opportunities include (but are not limited to):

- Traveling display kit with new photographs and a “theme”
- Interactive computer programs in schools, science centers and other public locations
- temporary displays in building lobbies, complete with photographs, equipment
- Information that can be displayed at the Seattle Aquarium and other public attractor destinations

## **Conclusion**

A well-planned information campaign will help increase baseline awareness of stormwater issues. A more educated public will be more likely to understand the need for change, new approaches and new infrastructure improvements and will be more inclined to work with, rather than against stormwater improvements.

## **Training Program**

The attached PowerPoint slides represent a partial representation of the stormwater training program. The steering committee met April 24, 2001, to discuss the focus of the communications plan and the training program. The committee members generally believed that the primary audience of both the communications plan and the training program should be on the elected and appointed leaders and, especially, on the key decisionmakers at state agencies. The communications plan and training program will outline the different programs that affect stormwater and how they relate to each other so that the decisionmakers have a better understanding of all the stormwater issues affecting their programs. The communications plan and the training program will also include an explanation of the findings and recommendations of the Stormwater Policy Advisory Committee.

The training program is divided into five separate modules:

- Overview
- Clean Water Act Programs
- Coastal Zone Management Act/Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendment Programs
- Endangered Species Act
- Safe Drinking Water Act

The Overview and Clean Water Act Programs modules are attached. The Overview discusses stormwater impacts on the environment and presents a short summary of all the modules and study recommendations. Each subsequent module summarizes the relevant programs that affect stormwater. The intended audience includes the key decisionmakers at State agencies in an effort to ensure they are aware of the different programs affecting stormwater.